

## Homeless people with mental illness to get court-ordered help

By Dan Nakaso

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Officials with the city, state and the Institute for Human Services are teaming up on a new approach to deal with homeless people with mental health issues by trying to get court-ordered help for the first of potentially hundreds of homeless people on Oahu. Mayor Kirk Caldwell on Monday announced a oneyear, \$500,000 contract between the city and IHS that initially will focus on trying to get Family Court judges to order mental health treatment for fewer than 10 homeless clients.

The contract follows the state Legislature's passage of SB 1124 last session to make it easier for judges to order homeless people with mental health issues to receive treatment such as the Invega drug, which has proved successful in treating mental illness.

Christopher Thomas, an attorney representing IHS, said the organization plans to go to Family Court in Kapolei to seek court approval for the first group.

The change in the law means attorneys only have to prove that a client is a danger to himself or herself — and not a danger to others — to enforce the monthly treatments, Thomas said.

At a press conference Monday at Chinatown's Smith-Beretania Park where homeless people gather every day, Caldwell thanked



**Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell, left, arrived Monday for a news conference at Smith-Beretania Park.**

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state Sen. Karl Rhoads (D, Downtown-Nuuanu-Liliha) for pushing the legislation and said the first cases will test the limits of the new law before the courts.

“All of us have a responsibility to tackle and solve this problem,” Caldwell said.

The one-year contract with IHS is aimed at “tackling the most difficult part of the (homeless) problem,” Caldwell said.

Caldwell was joined at Smith-Beretania Park by representatives from IHS and the state.

Connie Mitchell, IHS executive director, said her agency wants to help homeless clients who are “left alone to sleep in their own poop and pee” and sometimes are found with maggots growing out of open wounds.

The court-ordered treatment could help “reclaim years of life for some homeless people,” Mitchell said.

City officials said the new Outreach Navigation program is aimed at the most service-resistant, chronically homeless people with mental health issues who will not accept help.

In a statement, Mitchell said, “For the past two years, IHS has witnessed the miracle of new medication that’s cured mental illnesses for more than 40 chronically homeless individuals across Hawaii who were willing to accept treatment. Today, we are humbled to be awarded the homeless Outreach Navigation Program as it fulfills a much-needed gap in our system to help those who refuse, but are unaware they are sick, with obtaining access to treatment. Through assertive outreach,

guardianships and utilization of Hawaii's updated assisted community treatment law, we can take the necessary steps forward to help solve chronic homelessness in our state."

The program will rely on psychiatric services to develop and implement treatment plans and file for so-called Assisted Community Treatment orders.

In a statement, Marc Alexander, director of the city Office of Housing, said, "True compassion is getting folks who are suffering from mental illness off our streets. An analysis by the Medical Examiner has already shown that living without shelter leads to an average age of death of less than 53 years old, and often these deaths have a nexus to mental illness. We hope the new Outreach Navigation Program not only changes lives, but actually saves them."



**Marc Alexander, center, executive director of the Office of Housing, spoke Monday during a news conference at Smith-Beretania Park in downtown Honolulu. The conference, attended by Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell, left, members of his Cabinet and other stakeholders was to announce the city's new outreach program, to deal with the most service-resistant, chronically homeless.**

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